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FORT NELSON AND HUDSON'S BAY.

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SINCE Hudson's Bay and the surrounding territories became geographically and politically a part of the Dominion of Canada, all eyes are turned in that direction. The valuable fisheries that exist there, and the fact that a railway or railways are being built from Winnipeg to the coast of the bay are sufficient reasons for endeavoring to make ourselves familiar with that region. We ought to know its early history and the conflicts that have taken place, and especially between the English and the French, resulting in the occupation of the coast country and the far interior of the Hudson's Bay country, and of posts and places, forts and trade houses, by the British and the Dominion.

We learn from French sources that in 1545, only eleven years after Jacques Cartier's discovery of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and his visit to Montreal, one Alphonse, a native of Xaintonge, in France, fired with ambition and love of discovery, made a voyage to the North coast, but that Jean Bourdon penetrated still farther, and that in 1656, with a vessel of thirty tons burden, he explored the whole coast of Labrador, and then went on his course till he reached the Strait of Hudson's Bay, which he succeeded in getting through, then entered the great bay, and went on till he reached the head of these waters, after having made a circuit of seven to eight hundred leagues (French), and that the place he reached was but one hundred and thirty leagues from Quebec by land

This voyage of Bourdon was made for the purpose of establishing a trade with the Indians of Hudson's Bay.

In 1661, the Indians having become aware that there was a nation of strangers (not Indians) in their vicinity, sent deputies by land to Quebec, with a view of entering into trade with the French, and at the same time asked that a missionary might be sent to them.

Viscount d'Argenson, who was at that time the French Governor at Quebec, received the application of the Indian chiefs with grace, and undertook to send to their country a Jesuit Father named Dablon, together with Mr. de la Valliere, a gentleman of Normandy, accompanied by Dennis Guyon, Deprez Coutie, and François Pelletier. The names of these gentlemen are familiar to the French-Canadians of the present day, both in a civil and political capacity. These gentlemen thought to make the journey, and for that purpose engaged Indians of the Saguenay to pilot them to their destination.

This expedition, however, turned out disastrously; the Indians after making some attempt to conduct them on their journey being obliged to confess that they did not know the route, refused to proceed in the enterprise. In 1663, the Indians, still anxious to get up a trade with the French, sent to Quebec to request Mr. d'Avagour, the then Governor, to send them some Frenchmen, with whom they could establish trade relations.

The Governor this time sent five men, who made their way to the bay by land, and took possession in the name of the King of France. On this occasion they planted a cross on a height of land; they also placed at the foot of a large tree the King's arms engraven on brass.

The English now had their turn. In the year 1666, two French Canadian gentlemen named Des Grozeliers

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and De Radisson conceived what was then considered a chimerical idea, the establishing of trading posts even at the extreme western or south-western part of the bay coast. With this object in view they determined to take a different course from former expeditions. They adopted the Lake Superior route, the Lake of the Woods, Lake Winnipeg and the Nelson river, and in this way reached the bay at the mouth of the Nelson river. Thus it was demonstrated that the bay could be reached as well by the Superior route as by the Straits.

These French-Canadians afterwards applied to the French Government at Quebec, and to the home government in France, to allow them to conduct ships to the heart of the fur countries by way of Hudson's Straits. Both Governments refused their application. They then proceeded to Boston in the British colony of Massachusetts, thence to London, where they were received by British merchants, who were but too glad to engage them in the cause of establishing a trade with the Indians in the region of Hudson's Bay.

Mr. Gillam, connected with the Newfoundland trade, was entrusted with the duty of prosecuting the discovery, and to interest himself on the side of the English traders. He sailed in the "Nonsuch" ketch into Baffin's Bay in 1667 to the height of 75 degrees north, and from thence southward to 51 degrees, whence he entered a river, to which he gave the name of Prince Rupert, and finding the Indians favorable he erected a small fort there. This success induced the English Company shortly afterwards to establish forts or trading posts at Monsipi and at Kichichouanne.

As I gather from French accounts, the two French-Canadians, Des Groseliers and De Radisson, accompanied Gillam on his expedition.

The planting of Fort Rupert on the coast of the bay was the first attempt the English made in establishing trade with the Hudson's Bay; and was really the foundation of the Hudson's Bay Company, that great trading company which so long governed the North-west and monopolized the trade in that country.

The persons interested in the vessel which took Gillam and his associates to the coast, upon the return of Gillam applied for a patent to Charles the Second, who granted them the Hudson's Bay charter, dated the 2nd May, 1670.

Thus we have presented the singular fact that two French-Canadians, by their enterprise in visiting the coast by way of Lake Superior, baffled by the French and French Colonial Governments, threw themselves into the hands of London merchants, who became the founders and proprietors of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The London company, having got their grant, were not slow in availing themselves of their privileges, and soon erected a fort or trading post at the mouth of the Nelson river, which was interchangeably, as between the French and English, called Fort Bourbon or Fort Nelson. The question as to who was to secure the trade with the Indians of Hudson's Bay was daily growing in importance.

Des Groseliers and De Radisson, who had succeeded in giving a foothold to the English on the coast, were adventurers, as ready to serve the English as the French, or the French as the English, as best suited their interest. Leaving the service of the English they went to France, and, as the French historians say, repented of the mistake they had made in discovering to the English the advantages of Hudson's Bay, obtained pardon from the French king, promised to do better for the future, and returned to Canada.

The patronage of the King of France having been obtained, a French, or French-Canadian Company was formed for the purpose of contesting the claims of the English in Hudson's Bay, and to turn the trade in the direction of Quebec and France to the exclusion of the English.

Des Grozeliers and De Radisson were given the command of two vessels to trade with the natives of the Hudson's Bay region.

These two vessels succeeded in reaching the Saint Thérèse river, now called the Hayes river, which the map will show flows into Hudson's Bay at or near the debouchure of the Nelson river. Here they built a fort after the fashion of forts of that day, about seven leagues from Fort Nelson.

Three days after the arrival of the two vessels which Des Grozeliers and De Radisson commanded, there arrived from Boston another colonial barque, but this time it was from the British colony of Massachusetts. Still four days afterwards, another English vessel arrived from London, and anchored in the Nelson river near the Boston vessel. The French and English colonists fraternized. The colonists were jealous of the English, and the French historian alleges that becoming apprehensive that they would be seized by the English and made prizes of, they put themselves under their protection.

The English on the London vessel endeavored to make a landing near Fort Nelson, but were opposed by the holders of the fort. The ice beat so furiously against their vessels that they were compelled to cut their cables and sail out into the bay, where they were shipwrecked with the loss of forty men.

Des Grozeliers and De Radisson of the French vessels entered into a treaty with the Indians, left eight men to guard the fort and departed for Quebec.

A misunderstanding soon sprang up between Des Grozeliers and De Radisson and the French or French-Canadian Company, and the adventurers threw up all connection with the company, set out for Paris, and put themselves in the hands of Lord Preston, the British Ambassador at Paris.

The French story is that Lord Preston employed all the means at his disposal to induce the adventurers to go to London to unfold their designs, and succeeded.

Des Grozeliers and De Radisson offered the English traders in London to restore to them Fort Nelson, which they would have no difficulty in doing, inasmuch as they had left one Chouard, nephew of De Radisson and son of Des Grozeliers, in charge of the fort.

What is called the treachery of Des Grozeliers and De Radisson obliged the French company to take other measures, if they wished to build up a trade with the Indians of Hudson's Bay: accordingly, in the following year, the company sent two small vessels into the bay. These vessels were under the command of M. de la Martinière, who on reaching Fort Nelson, was surprised to find it in possession of the English. Martinière wintered six months in the river Matcispi, opposite Fort Nelson, made a treaty with the Indians and on the 16th July set sail for Quebec: he would have remained longer in the Hudson's Bay country to await assistance from France, but his people apprehended danger from want of provisions, and being in danger of being blocked in by ice for the winter, set fire to the fort and left. In the course of his return voyage to Quebec, he fell in on the coast of Labrador with an English ketch, which was making its way to bay, but was obliged to succumb to the Martinière and his companions. The English ketch became the prize of the French voyager.

In the year 1685, the French company having laid before the King of France a statement of the action, or, as termed by them, the usurpation of the English, in having rendered themselves possessors of Fort Nelson, obtained from His Majesty and his council a concession of the full and exclusive enjoyment of the river Saint Thérèse (Hayes river).

In 1686, the Chevalier-de-Troyes captain of infantry at Quebec, accompanied by three Canadian brothers

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and many others, set out from Quebec on foot, with the design of making conquest of the three English forts at Rupert, Monsipi and Kichichouanne. They started on their journey in the month of March, carrying on their backs their canoes and provisions, and, after many trials, arrived before Monsipi on the 20th June. The French relater of the incidents of this perilous and fatiguing march says, "Il fallait etre Canadien pour supporter les incommoditez d'une si longue traverse."

It would be too long for a magazine article to enter into all the details of this undertaking: it is sufficient to say that the English fort fell under the blows administered by the French Canadians, and that Troyes and D'Iberville, the commanders of the expedition, and indeed, all their compatriots, gained much eclât for the parts they played in the enterprise.

To judge of the magnitude of the undertaking, one has to take into account the rough and wooded country the French Canadians had to traverse, with but themselves to do the carrying of the boats, and provide commisariat for the successful accomplishment of their mission.

Having succeeded in taking the three forts to which I have referred, the French could well afford to lie on their oars for awhile, even though the Hudson Bay Company by the occupation of Fort Nelson should be enabled to diminish their catch of fish or deprive them of a goodly number of beaver skins, martin, loup marins or sea wolf, caribou and deer, and the skins of the many other wild animals which infested the woods and forests surrounding Hudson's Bay.

Here I may make a diversion, to make special allusion to the beaver or "castor," the national emblem of Canada. Of all the animals in the Northwest, the beaver was held in the greatest reverence—that was because of its capacity for hard work, perseverance and skill in building houses for themselves, and for the wonderful intelligence they displayed in all their operations. Monsieur de Bacqueville de la Potherie, cousin of the Duke of Orleans, Regent of France in 1722, who accompanied the expedition to which I have referred, in one of his letters giving a detailed account of the voyage, also gives a detailed account of this animal, of its haunts, how it worked, felling trees for its winter hut, how it provided means of escape in case of flood or the burglarious action of other animals, and indeed, of all its qualities of architect, carpenter, joiner, mason and all other mechanical arts required in the construction of houses. Writing of the castor (beaver), he says: "Elle est si admirable que l'on reconnoit en lui l'autorité d'un maitre absolu, et véritable caractère d'un Père de famille, et le genie d'un habile Architecte; aussi les sauvages disent que c'est un esprit et non pas un animal."

We will now return to Fort Nelson. This fort, the importance of which was recognized both by the French and English, we have seen fell into the hands of the English of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1687, and had since been under their control.

In 1694, the French and French Canadians having possessed themselves of the Forts Kichichouanne, Rupert and Monsipi, now turned their attention to the capturing of Fort Nelson. The King of France supplied the Quebec company with two vessels, the *Poli* and the *Salamander*, to lead an expedition for the recovery of this fort. D'Iberville was given the command, and proceeded to Quebec where he engaged one hundred and twenty French Canadians to go with him to Fort Nelson. He and his compatriots set out from Quebec on the eighth of August, and arrived before the fort on the twenty-fourth of September. D'Iberville besieged the fort for eight days, and then bombarded the fortifications for eight days. The garrison was not a very large one, only fifty-six men. On the 12th of October,

the fire of the besiegers becoming too hot for the besieged, the fort with the garrison of fifty-six men and fifty pieces of cannon was surrendered, and the Quebec company became master of the field.

At the end of fifteen months, D'Iberville returned to France, leaving one La Forêt governor of the place.

In 1696, the English appeared before the fort with four vessels of war and one gun boat. La Forêt disputed their landing as well as he was able; all, however, of no avail, as the garrison was soon compelled to surrender the fort. making it a stipulation that they should retain the beaver skins in the fort; a stipulation which, the French say, the English failed to keep, and took the beaver skins and an Iroquois Indian Chief with them to England.

The French government, incensed at the conduct of the English, now determined to make vigorous efforts to re-establish their authority at Fort Nelson. For this purpose, the King sent out a squadron of four prime vessels, the *Pelican*, the *Palmier*, the *Weesph* and *Le Profond*, with instructions to capture Fort Nelson at all hazards.

These vessels, after a voyage of nearly six months, arrived in view of Fort Nelson on the 3rd September, 1697.

Two days afterwards, they were surprised to find three ships, under full sail, coming up the Hudson's Bay. These ships were the English ships, the *Hampshire*, fifty-six cannons and 250 men; the *Dering*, of thirty-five guns, and the *Hudson Bay*, of thirty-two guns.

Mr. de Bacqueville, one of the officers of the expedition, gives a full and particular account of all the manœuvres of the French squadron till it reached Fort Nelson, and made war upon the English and their vessels, amidst the ice of Hudson's Bay and on land up to that time more frequented by the Esquimaux, bears, wolves and other wild animals than by civilized people. His account of this outward-bound voyage, and all its incidents, from its beginning to its termination, though most interesting, can only receive a short notice here. Suffice it to say, that Serigni, Lieutenant of *Le Palmier*, with this expedition, on its setting out from Rochelle, on the 7th of April, 1697, found himself in command of the fleet, owing to the absence of D'Iberville, who had been occupied conducting an enterprise for capturing the English forts or trading-houses on the coasts of Newfoundland and Cape Breton. It was the King's instruction that D'Iberville should be placed in command at Plaisance, a large and beautiful bay of Newfoundland, and be responsible for the success of the expedition to Hudson's Bay.

When the French squadron arrived at Plaisance, they found that D'Iberville was absent, making war on the English settlements in Acadia (Nova Scotia). Before M. d'Iberville arrived at Plaisance, M. Du Brouilion, governor of the place, had made an unsuccessful attempt to take St. John's (Newfoundland) by sea, and had returned to his government. When M. d'Iberville came back, DuBrouillon and he concerted together as to the best means to be taken to possess themselves of the island. The plan adopted was a combined attack to reduce St. John's, the principal place of the island. M. d'Iberville appointed Montigni, lieutenant of a Canadian infantry company, to be his lieutenant; and then, with Du Brouillon in command of a detachment, the combined forces took up their winter march. The enterprise proved successful and St John's fell, under and by the skilful management of an able commander. Whatever credit was to be taken out of the capture belonged to the French Canadians, to whom D'Iberville had given the foremost place in the campaign. D'Iberville also had in his retinue Pierre Jeanbeoville, an Abenaqui Indian Chief, and L'Abbé Baudoin, who rendered much service in inspiring the

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Canadians with increased courage by administering to them the rite of absolution before engaging in battle. The operations for the reduction of Newfoundland resulted in the taking of upwards of thirty harbors and fishing-places in the hands of the French. This was a great blow to the English commerce in Newfoundland, which thereby became crippled and well nigh lost to the British nation.

To return to Hudson's Bay. We have said that the opposing English and French squadrons met before Fort Nelson on the 3rd of September. As soon as the English came within fighting distance of the French they formed themselves into line of battle. The combat soon commenced in earnest.

The French had determined to have Fort Nelson or die in the attempt. They first attacked the *Hampshire*, then the *Dering*, and soon the *Hudson's Bay*.

The sea fight between the opposing ships was well sustained by both sides for several hours.

The result, however, was against the English. The *Hampshire* was sunk, the *Hudson's Bay* struck her flag, and the *Dering* put to sea, no longer able to withstand the prowess of the French arms.

The treaty of Rigswick was signed that year, and left the French in possession of all the forts on Hudson's Bay.

During the next fifteen years, the English trade was restricted, but by the treaty of Utrecht, A.D. 1713, all the territories of the bay were ceded to the English.

The Hudson's Bay Company were at once restored to the rights and privileges which they had enjoyed under the patent of Charles II., A.D. 1670; these rights and privileges they enjoyed uninterruptedly, in the exercise of which they amassed great wealth, for a period of more than one hundred and fifty years.

On the 19th day of November, 1869, the company, by deed, surrendered to Her Majesty, the Queen of Great Britain, all the rights of government and other rights, privileges, liberties, franchises, powers and authorities which had been granted to the company by patent of Charles II., and by an order in council, dated at Windsor, on the 23rd day of June, 1870, Her Majesty in council, granted to the Dominion of Canada, Rupert's Land and the Northwestern Territory, by virtue of which, under certain conditions and reservations, Canada became possessed of the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company.

As we have seen, French Canadians had much to do in the outset in opening up the Hudson's Bay trade with the Indians, and it would seem no more than justice that the Dominion of Canada, occupied, as it is, by a mixed people, of Anglo Saxon and Norman descent, should be restored to their own in the possession of the territories, rights and privileges of the Hudson's Bay Company.